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SUBJECT: HONDURAN ELECTIONS NEWS: UPDATE 7

REF: (A) Tegucigalpa 2051

- (B) Tegucigalpa 1984
- (C) Tegucigalpa 1968
- (D) Tegucigalpa 1949
- (E) Tegucigalpa 1680
- (F) Tegucigalpa 1665

#### Lobo Orders End to "Combos" in National Party

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1. National Party presidential candidate Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo has called for all National Party candidates, particularly those running for Congress, to refrain from campaigning in "combos". Candidates recently adopted this modality of campaigning to lessen campaign costs (ref C). Pepe Lobo's orders are clear: All congressional candidates in each department must work as a team. He reminded the candidates that the National Party is a serious institution, characterized by the discipline of its members. Combos, he said, only work in fast food restaurants and that is where they should remain. Lobo was accompanied by members of the Central Committee, the party's Political Committee, and candidates from the Departments of Cortes, Choluteca, Francisco Morazan, and Olancho when he issued his orders.

#### Military to be Custodians of Ballots

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2. More than 9,000 members of the Honduran Armed Forces will be custodians of the electoral ballots in the November 27 general elections. The total cost of the operations will be 23 million lempiras (USD 1.2 million). This is necessary in order to prevent errors in the process of sending electoral materials to the voting areas or collecting the votes from the voting centers after the election is closed.

3. The strategy is that military personnel will be deployed throughout the country supported by 706 lightweight vehicles, 35 boats, two planes, eight helicopters and 499 vehicles from other government agencies to distribute all the voting materials to the 18 departments. The budget will be used to acquire paper, ink, gasoline, spare parts, per diem costs, commercial services, machine rentals and private transportation.

4. The Honduran military will secure all the centers where materials are stored, as well as the polling centers during the electoral process, and collect the ballots and materials after the election. In addition, they will be in charge of the transportation logistics and be responsible for disbursement of electoral materials to local election officials. The military will be available to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) for 30 days after the end of the electoral process. Aristides Mejia, President of the TSE, said that the alliance with the Honduran Armed Forces is very important logistical one, however, the ultimate responsibility for the electoral process will fall on the TSE. Post notes that concern has been raised by four other

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political parties regarding a potential conflict of interest given that the Minister of Defense is also a member of the Political Commission of the National Party (ref C).

#### COHEP Cancels Presidential Debates

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5. The Honduran Private Enterprise Council (COHEP) invited candidates of the five political parties to present their government plans for Honduras and to debate with their presidential, vice presidential and municipal counterparts. After repeated delays due to the reluctance of Lobo to participate in such debates, on September 26, COHEP cancelled the presidential debates. COHEP said the reason for the cancellation was "that the National Party had refused to participate specifically for strategic reasons." COHEP apologized to its members, businesses, and supporters of the event and expressed its regret. In its statement, COHEP also reminded the parties "that democracy is forged with serious, concrete positions, well-defended solid arguments, seriousness, and political maturity. Otherwise campaigns become low-level, mere propaganda events, plagued with

insults and political immaturity, which project the candidates' lack of capacity to govern." Judging from the current campaigns and interplay, COHEP fairly accurately pegged the current state of the campaign.

Williard